

Wembley whispers at Gander Green Lane

SUTTON UNITED 5, WYCOMBE WANDERERS 1
HAPPINESS was Gander Green Lane about 4.45 pm on Saturday as Sutton completed their best win of the season before their biggest crowd and so progressed to the last 16 of the FA Trophy.

Jubilant manager Barrie Williams said: "It was a battling performance and we competed in all areas."

But what pleased him most was United's clinical finishing for they scarcely wasted an opening in the entire 90 minutes.

It was a great day for veteran Larry Pritchard who received a surprise presentation of a silver salver and goblets from the players and officials of both Sutton and Wycombe before the match to mark his 20 years in senior non-league soccer. He made his debut for Epsom and Ewell on January 28, 1961.

It was the first time Sutton had progressed beyond the first round of the Trophy and as a special gesture, United's players clubbed together to provide the match ball.

And after Saturday's performance, I can foresee manager Williams having a quick whip round the lads before every future Trophy hurdle.

Yes, it was heady stuff at the Borough Sports Ground on Saturday and had man of the moment Pritchard bubbling with delight: "Given a reasonable draw and the run of the ball, we could certainly get to Wembley again."

I suspect that Larry intends to be around the soccer scene for several more years, but, if not, what better way to bow out than in a Wembley final. And that would make his fourth appearance at the twin towers.

However, back to basics and an entertaining and open match with

By
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Sutton by far the more determined team in all departments. The blend is there for all to see and they gelled together like a closed shop on this occasion.

To be fair, Wycombe contributed in no small way to making this a fine spectacle. But they were frail up front while their defence appeared cumbersome against the incisive thrust of the home team.

Indeed, the visitors frequently dived with death as they relied on a rather ramshackle offside trap that always threatened to collapse around their feet.

Yet Wycombe created the earliest chances and Terry Scott headed over from two yards while Steve Long almost crept in with a low drive across the face of goal.

However, Sutton soon got into their stride and John Rains almost put them in front with a downward header that was scooped off the line after a half save by goalkeeper Gary Lester.

Danger man Terry Glynn was well policed by the home side and although this allowed Scott extra freedom, his shooting was well off target.

It was a break by Graham Dennis that set Sutton on their way after 28 minutes. He found Ian Parsons whose square ball beat two defenders before Mick Joyce steered it home.

Dave Collyer made a superb save as Wycombe hit back, but United made it 2-0 one minute before the break with another goal, notable mainly for its simplicity.

Again Dennis sparked off the move — what an astute transaction to get him back in amber and chocolate — with a ball out to Joyce and Ian Parsons timed his run perfectly to chip over the advancing Lester.

Early in the second half George Borg earned his ninth booking for tripping Mick Joyce who also had his name taken for retaliation. And that was really the only time one noticed referee Martin Bodenham of Brighton who always allowed play to flow to everyone's advantage.

Wycombe introduced free scoring substitute Gary Toll in an effort to stem the tide in the 52nd minute, but Sutton added their third goal just two minutes later when Ray Sunnucks conjured something out of nothing and fired a superb shot into the top corner from the edge of the box.

Dennis and Joyce then paved the way for United's fourth goal in the 69th minute when Parsons stole in to put the final touch to a hard, low cross from Keith Waldon.

Three minutes later, Tony Rains fouled Holifield and Howard Kennedy reduced the arrears from the penalty spot.

But there was to be no revival and with Parsons and Sunnucks fast getting back to their best, Wycombe were left wandering and wondering.

And it was three goals inside six minutes when Sunnucks sent man of the match Dennis away on a mazy 30-yard run to cap a great display with United's final goal.

So, with five wins and three draws from their last nine games, Sutton are really starting to transmit their obvious potential into fact and if they can maintain this determination, there is some justification for whispers of another Wembley along the corridors of Gander Green Lane.

Sutton United — Collyer, Rogers, Green, J. Rains, T. Rains, Sunnucks, Waldon, Pritchard, Joyce, Parsons, Dennis.

Wycombe — Lester, Birdseye, Borg, Davies, Bycroft, Dell, Long, Kennedy, Glynn, Scott, Holifield. Sub: Toll for Long.